

budget cuts, and many of those voted against it in the committee. Now, no one in this body understands sequestration any better than my friend from Illinois.

Sequestration was supposed to be so absurd—I repeat—so foolish, that it would force Congress to balance in a sensible manner. Yet what the Republicans considered lunacy a few years ago is now the preferred form of legislating, the preferred form of budgeting. That tells you everything you need to know about today's Republican Party. They are beating their chests about how great sequestration is. Isn't it great that all of these Federal agencies are being cut.

The Reed amendment would have allowed the Democrats and Republicans to negotiate a balanced budget and would have rescinded sequestration, while ensuring adequate funding to the Department of Defense and nondefense programs. Instead, by rejecting Senator REED's legislation, the Republicans have effectively said spend first, budget later. Here is what they have come up with. They are saying: Ready, fire, aim. Or they are saying: Fire, ready, aim. We know they are not saying: Ready, aim, fire. They have it all backwards, like everything they have done here legislatively—like ostriches with their heads buried deep in the sand.

The majority leader and Republicans continue to deny the need for a bipartisan budget. They deny the need to fix sequestration, just as they deny the urgent need to authorize the Export-Import Bank, which employs 165,000 people in America, as we speak. It expires at the end of this month.

They deny the urgent need to fix our roads, rails, and bridges. That program is going to expire in 6 weeks, which creates millions of jobs—millions of jobs.

Regardless of what Republicans tell themselves, they cannot wish these important issues to just disappear. It is our job to address these matters that affect working Americans.

Here we are in June, months before funding for the government runs out. We have plenty of time to sit down and work out an agreement that both sides can work out. It appears to me what the Republicans are doing is that we are heading for another shutdown. They did it once; they are going to do it again. They want to do nothing now. They want to wait until the fiscal year ends and then lock it up—close up government. There is no reason for this to become yet another manufactured crisis, and that is what we have here.

We can, I repeat, months before the funding for government runs out, do something about it. Do they desire another closed government? I hope not. But it appears that is where we are headed. The Republicans are unwilling to do things that are real. So I urge my Republican colleagues to change course, instead of barreling ahead with bills they know are going to fail.

The Defense authorization bill, the President is going to veto. The veto will be upheld. We will do it over here. But the House already has enough votes to sustain the President's veto. It is just moving forward for reasons that I do not fully understand. I urge them to change course, work with us to forge an agreement that can get signed into law.

The majority leader's party can continue to ignore and procrastinate all they want, but eventually we will need to negotiate a budget free of sequestration, a budget that protects our military and also nondefense, our middle class. Eventually, we will need to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank, I repeat, which sustains hundreds of thousands of jobs and is responsible for billions of dollars in U.S. exports.

Now, eventually we need to find a lasting way to fund on a long-term basis our American highways. Fifty percent of our highways are deficient, 64,000 bridges—50 percent of those are structurally deficient. Not far from here, over the great Memorial Bridge, they are closing two lanes. Why? Because it has rotted away. Hundreds of thousands of people go over that every day—or they used to. So why wait? Instead of waiting for the President to veto their sham funding mechanism and then scramble to craft some last-minute, hastily wrought continuing resolution, the Republicans should work with us on a bipartisan solution now. We are ready to cooperate with Republicans to pass legislation that keeps America safe and protects the middle class. But to do that, my Republican colleagues will first have to pull their heads out of the sand.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CORTON). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided, with the Democrats controlling the first half and the majority controlling the second half.

The assistant Democratic leader.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we are considering this bill, and you can see by the size of it, it is a major undertaking. It comes up every year. It is the Department of Defense Authorization Act. It is an extraordinarily important bill. It literally authorizes programs for the defense of America.

We have two able leaders who brought the bill to the floor. One is the

chairman of the Armed Services Committee, JOHN MCCAIN, a man with whom I entered the House many years ago and a man whose reputation and service to America is well known. He is someone who has served in the U.S. Navy, was a prisoner of war during the Vietnam war, and has been a leader in speaking out on behalf of the military throughout his life. It is built into his family. It is built into his soul.

On our side, we have Senator JACK REED from Rhode Island. Senator REED is a graduate of the West Point Military Academy. He served as well in the Active Army. He brings that service, that part of his life to his work on the Democratic side of the aisle. When it came to putting this bill together, I do not think we could have picked two more able leaders from the Senate, a Republican and a Democrat, to bring this bill to the floor.

They have their differences. But for the most part they agree on this bill. It was troubling this morning to hear the Republican majority leader suggest that the differences we have over this bill suggest a lack of commitment by Democrats to the military of the United States. That is not true. It is not fair. We are as committed on our side of the aisle as those on the other side of the aisle when it comes to the men and women in uniform—committed to making certain that they have what they need to be trained, to fight effectively, and to come home safely.

We are also committed to bringing them home to a welcoming America, preparing veterans programs for the rest of their lives, so they can have productive lives, happy lives after having risked their lives for America.

So to suggest that the Republicans are for the military and Democrats are against it, I regret that the majority leader made that suggestion. Both sides are committed—both the chairman and the ranking member are committed. But what is the issue that divides us when it comes to this bill? It is basically an issue of funding. Here is what it comes down to: We have a Budget Control Act, and if we do not hit the numbers in spending, in comes sequestration. What is sequestration? It is an across-the-board cut.

We do not want to see that happen. We have seen it. We know what it does. It was devastating to the Department of Defense when we went into sequestration. I know because I chaired the Appropriations Committee and I listened to the Secretary of Defense and the leaders from our branches and services tell us: It is impossible for us to budget an effective national security if we have to wonder whether we are going to face an across-the-board cut. I can understand that, not only in readiness, which is essential to the survival of our troops, but also in the procurement of substantial, expensive, important, and necessary technology.

So Senator MCCAIN on the Republican side brings to the floor this authorization bill and says: We will solve